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ABSTRACT

This document first takes up the broader aspects of accountability, then details in later sections specific state legislation for assessment and accountability. There are three parts. Part I, "A Crisis in Education: Accountability and Quality," provides an overview of the current issues surrounding teacher accountability. Part II, "Guidelines for Quality Education," informs the reader of a checklist that may be used to relate elements of accountability legislation to the established needs of quality education. Part III, "Accountability: From Fantasy to Reality," suggests what teacher associations can do to operate under excessively restrictive legislation. (JB)

ED 077894

ACCOUNTABILITY

This document has been prepared by the Instruction and Professional Development Staff of the National Education Association. It contains Parts I, II, and III of a four-part information package on this topic.

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INTRODUCTION

This information package deals first with the broader aspects of accountability and then becomes quite specific in terms of state legislation for assessment and accountability. We believe it represents an important start in what will become a continuing effort to keep the leadership network of the united teaching profession abreast of recent developments in this most important trend in American education.

Accountability, like ecology and relevance, is a popular but often misused slogan that has caught the public fancy with its promise to improve the schools —all too often by simply finding scapegoats and/or saving money. Accountability ("See responsibility," says the dictionary) is a means to an end. It is not an end in itself. Nevertheless, more and more students and teachers are being victimized as a result of so-called accountability laws enacted with increasing frequency by state legislatures. Unfortunately such laws are often ill-conceived and unevenly enforced, and their effects in the classrooms of several states point already to a developing crisis of national proportions—a crisis that involves not only members of the teaching profession but the very foundations of our public school system.

If the united teaching profession is to deal effectively and positively with this developing crisis, it is essential that our actions be firmly based on facts and an understanding of the political, social, and economic implications of the educational accountability movement. Is it basically a good idea that is being badly applied for limited political purposes? Can the teaching profession seize the banner of accountability and use it as the essential weapon in the struggle for self-governance and a new degree of professional autonomy? Answers to such questions at this point in time may be premature until more facts are in. On the other hand, the Association has a responsibility to act with speed and vigor in correcting actions that are clearly damaging to the teaching profession and to the public interest it is dedicated to serve.

The problem is stated succinctly in the NEA's Current Resolution 32, "Accountability," as adopted by the 1972 Representative Assembly:

> The National Education Association recognizes that the term "accountability" as applied to public education is subject to varied interpretations. The Association maintains that educational excellence for each child is the objective of the educational system. The Association believes that educators can be accountable only to the degree that they share responsibility in educational decision-making and to the degree that other parties who share this responsibility—legislators, other government officials, school boards, parents, students, and taxpayers —are also held accountable.

Behind the often ill-defined but pervasive idea of accountability are a few simple concepts: (1) if something is to be done, the first step is to decide just exactly what it is that must be done; (2) a decision must be made as to the best way to do it; and (3) ways must be devised to determine when the job has been accomplished and how well it was done. Accountability is only one part, the last part, of this simple, three-step process or system. But accountability is neither possible nor moral without a good deal of control over the whole process: step one, what is to be done; and step two, how it is to be done.

One need not be a systems engineer or a specialist in management to expand on this elementary, three-step idea and apply it to a school. In most schools, the results of such an exercise will clearly indicate that the teacher has either too little control or no control at all over the factors that might render accountability either feasible or fair. Under most existing conditions today, it is pure myth that teachers can justifiably be held accountable for "products" over which they have so little control.

This information package is made up of four parts:

I. "A Crisis in Education: Accountability and Quality"

II. "Guidelines for Quality Education"

III. "Accountability: From Fantasy to Reality"

IV. "Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education"

Part I provides an overview of what in some states has already become an accountability crisis. In this paper, the often simplistic push to hold teachers accountable for a process over which they have so little control is related to the broader but well-established ingredients of a quality education program.

Part II provides the reader with a checklist that can be used to relate the

elements—one might say, the demands—of accountability advocates to the more rational and well-established needs of quality education. When the advocates of accountability are given a chance to consider the logical constraints of a quality education program, it can be hoped that the results will be a tempering of their zeal and an increase in their understanding of the futility of imposing a single-track version of accountability on the enormously complex system of public education.

Part III calls attention to what teacher associations can do now. It also provides some realistic answers to the questions posed on the preceding page. The political realities of accountability are related to the theoretical "fantasy" of what might have been done with the idea of accountability before it became politicized in some localities.

Part IV, "Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education," has been made available to the NEA by the publisher, Cooperative Accountability Project. This report, together with the two-page "addendum" of October 1972, reports on state legislation dealing with statewide assessment programs, accountability programs, and PPBS systems. Some of the statutes included in this report were initiated and recommended by state education agencies; others were mandated by state legislatures. Further information on this project may be obtained from the State Educational Accountability Repository, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 126 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53702.

Additional information in accountability and all of its related elements has become an ongoing task here, and you will be receiving additional packets of information on this and related developments. In the meantime, we are asking each state association to name an appropriate staff liaison officer with whom we can work as we move toward what is fast becoming a clearinghouse on accountability for the united teaching profession. We will appreciate your help and your suggestions.

James W. Becker

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Washington, D.C.
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Part I

A CRISIS IN EDUCATION: ACCOUNTABILITY AND QUALITY

Compulsion about accountability in education has reached crisis proportion in at least thirty states and is spreading fast to all fifty. The compulsion, the obsessive desire to make educators and students conform is the crisis, not the need for or desirability of, efforts to be more accountable (responsible). More precisely, there are under way deliberate attempts to legislate or decree performance, testing, and achievement levels—in other words, to remove the prerogatives of professionals and the local school district to devise and carry out programs of education that fit their particular clientele. Most of the proposed legislation and decrees are punitive, ill conceived, and probably inoperative. And they have for the most part been developed without the collaboration and consultation of the organized teaching profession.

Therefore, it is essential that educators, through the organized profession, be apprised of the situation, think through their position, and plan their strategy, if they are to have a part in shaping what happens. The stakes are high. They go beyond the welfare of students and teachers. The very future of public education is in the balance. In many states, the sequence of events is at a stage where the trend of all future developments in accountability is being determined. The time for action is now.

We contend that there is a legitimate case to be made for greater accountability in education. People (educators included) want to be more sure that human effort and material expenditure achieve demonstrably the purposes and goals for which they have been allocated. These advocates of greater accountability want first not to short-change the public: they want taxpayers to get the best service and products for the dollars they pay; they want students to get an education that is commensurate with the human and material resources expended—for the benefit of both the learner and the society of which he is a part.

The motivations for the desire for accountability in education are many: some are constructive and positive; others are punitive and selfish. We contend that any effort to achieve greater accountability must be seen in a context of a larger systematic way of achieving human objectives, a context that is concerned, first, with the objectives to be met; second, with a plan and system to achieve stated objectives; and third, with a continuing measurement effort to determine both the degree to which objectives are met, the adequacy of the method, and the adaptability of the system for achieving objectives. Hence, accountability is seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

NEA could wholeheartedly endorse the above concept of accountability if it were the currently accepted notion. The NEA pledges to work unstintingly in fostering the conditions, circumstances, and attitudes essential for a workable system of accountability in education. The NEA cannot endorse or support many current activities undertaken in the name of accountability, where the sole purpose is to reduce cost regardless of effect.

Many well-meaning citizens and legislators have endorsed the drive for greater accountability. Too many, however, have succumbed to overly simplistic schemes for achieving greater accountability and more responsibility in education, the current result of which has been threatening and counterproductive. (We prefer—and urge the substitution of—the word "responsibility" for "accountability" from this point on, because it is more comprehensive, more positive, and more connotative of the efforts exerted in the area of rights and responsibilities throughout the history of our American Republic. "Responsibility" is more descriptive of characteristics and actions in the human services; "accountability" is more appropriately applied to the production of goods and products that are quantifiable or countable, as in business and industry.)

Simple notions of educational accountability (responsibility) suggest that the effectiveness of schools can be assessed by evaluating in isolation the performance of teachers and/or the achievement of their students. The simple solution, after such assessment, is to continue the employment and certification of those teachers who perform adequately, who produce learning in youngsters, and to dismiss those who perform inadequately, who do not produce learning in their students.

Such simple notions sound plausible because our society is product-oriented. The business-industrial model of accountability (responsibility) prevails. Tragically, it is transferred without question to the development of our human resources, our children. The error in such thinking is that "...men cannot produce people...man cannot learn children, but he can help children learn. He cannot grow a child, but he can help a youngster grow—intellectually, emotionally, physically, or otherwise. Men can build houses and airplanes and things, but they can only work with the life process and alongside of growing organisms to help the persons...grow on their own."[1]

The simplistic solution is no longer merely a matter of academic debate. It is being proposed again and again as a statewide policy. State legislatures and boards of education are accepting, perhaps for lack of a better model, the business-industrial model of accountability (responsibility). Legislation and state board of education decrees are being proposed to implement a simple cause-and-effect system of accountability (responsibility). The results are potentially devastating to students and teachers—but most important, to society. It's a case of acceding to a closed system—to educational fascism—in other words, compelling, constraining, and coercing educators and students to comply with inhumane, arbitrarily set requirements for education.

If some of the mindless, punitive requirements for schools now being proposed are adopted, educational progress—in fact the public school enterprise—will be dehumanized; subverted; demoralized; and in the process, destroyed.

The crisis is now. How the public cry for accountability (responsibility) is handled will establish the tone, the flavor, the very essence of education for the next decade.

We obviously cannot accept the simplistic approach. Not because we reject the idea of accountability (responsibility) in education but because we know that teacher performance and student achievement are only two of many factors that determine the quality of schooling, because the approach singles

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[1]Frymier, Jack. Foreword to Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives by Arthur W. Combs. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1972.

out scapegoats, and because it cannot cause improvement without other parallel actions to fix and monitor responsibility.

Hence, we submit, if accountability (responsibility) is to be more fully assumed, professionals and the public must consider the educational enterprise as the complex undertaking it is. They must consider the responsibilities that exist in education, where and by whom such responsibilities should be assumed, and how they can be monitored to ensure that they are being carried out.

To be more explicit about what is involved in setting, fixing, and monitoring responsibility, we have examined most of the proposed or enacted state board decrees and legislative actions—and have added other components that should be considered in attempts to assure greater accountability (responsibility). All of which leads us to the conclusion that the first task might well be to examine existing educational policy(ies) or legislative act(s) before designing new proposals. Such a review may well reveal that the authority already exists to achieve greater accountability and that the attention needs to be given to how such authority is exercised.

We contend that 1) goals, 2) students, 3) program, 4) staff, 5) resources, and 6) governance of education and the teaching profession are elements of quality education for which responsibility should be fixed and monitored if educators and the public are to assure accountable (responsible) education. We contend further that a review of these elements in terms of the existing operation of education in states and school districts will help professionals and laymen (and legislators and state board members) to identify the measures needed to achieve greater accountability (responsibility) in education. The valuing as to adequacy in each setting is the responsibility of the people involved.

Part II on accountability (responsibility) that follows outlines in brief form the elements of accountability (responsibility) in a context of quality education.

Part II

GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

When quality education is the purpose in devising plans for greater accountability (responsibility) in education, a number of elements in the educational enterprise must be assessed and several agencies and groups must assume complementing responsibilities. The various elements of the educational enterprise provide a comprehensive scheme or framework against which laymen and professionals can collect valid data and assess existing and needed provisions for responsible action (accountability) in education. These elements (goals, students, program, staff, resources, and governance) are, we contend, essentially guidelines for quality education. All of them may not be precisely appropriate in every state, but they do form a frame that can be adapted to the unique circumstances of each state.

As stated in the following pages, the elements of accountability (responsibility) for quality education are in outline form. They are a skeleton which must be fleshed out to be comprehensive. In subsequent materials being developed, adapted, and selected from existing sources, each of the following topics will be expanded. The outline presented here provides specifics for assessment that should help in countering the arguments of proponents of plans for simply evaluating teachers and testing students.

We have not attempted to suggest with whom responsibility should be fixed or how the application of guidelines should be monitored. Both of these considerations will be addressed in forthcoming materials. The nature of the guidelines, however, makes clear that most of the actual assessment for accountability (responsibility) must be done where the action takes place. In many of the items local, even building or neighborhood, actions are called for, thus suggesting that decisions about responsibility (and accountability) are best recognized and assumed where teaching and learning take place.

The following elements of accountability (responsibility) for quality education are divided into six parts, which may be considered separately in

discussion and evaluation but which are inevitably part of an integrated whole.

Goal and Objective Setting

Policies and procedures exist and are used for the general public to be involved in setting the broad goals and objectives of public schools.

Procedures exist and are used to involve representatives of the public in the continuing process of goal review and revision.

Procedures exist and are used periodically to get input and/or approval from all who can and will vote in a local district and state.

Procedures exist and are used for teachers and other educators to inform and influence the public in setting goals and objectives for schooling.

Procedures exist and are used to get continuous input and recommendations from students on the goals and objectives of education.

Goals and objectives, statewide and local, have been established and are made public.

State legislation or state board of education decree exists, with adequate funding, to make the above possible.

Students

Student needs (as viewed by parents, teachers, and students) are assessed regularly in a broadly comprehensive manner at both the state and local level, including:

achievement, intelligence, aptitude, and demographic data (standard and other)

descriptive data on interests, rate of learning, special talents, modes of thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, etc.

Periodic assessments are made to chart general changes, i.e., cultural roles, of children and adolescents.

Regular assessments are made locally to chronicle the degree to and ways in which students are involved in determining their own school study.

Students are involved in the governance of the school they attend, participating in both academic (curricular) decisions and the social-political governance of the school.

Provisions exist in law, or state and local board of education policies, to make the above possible.

School Program

Program reflects the goals and objectives set at both state and local levels.

Students, parents, and teachers provide the major inputs in determining local school program.

Local program goals have been established and are made public.

Program is sufficiently broad and varied to serve a diversity of students.

Evaluation of school program is undertaken regularly to assess progress against goals and objectives.

Evaluation (as far as possible) is primarily longitudinal (formative) and long-range—placing emphasis on student learning and development over a period of years rather than semester by semester or course by course (summative).

Program for each student is individualized to fit the uniqueness of each learner.

Provisions in law or by state board policy provide the human and material resources to carry out the above.

Staff

Selection – staff is selected according to carefully established criteria by the school administrator of a unit, on the basis of recommendations of appropriate staff, parents, and students.

Requirements for the selection of staff include demonstrated adequacy in liberal education, a field of specialization, and teaching performance—usually a year of internship is expected prior to a first teaching job.

New staff serve an agreed-upon probationary period, during which carefully planned orientation, assistance, and evaluation are provided. Decisions about regular or permanent employment status are made on the basis of several evaluations conducted throughout the probationary period.

Assignment – the assignment of specific responsibilities is made on the basis of training, experience, background, personality, and desire. A school

faculty is considered a professional team in which there is balance, diversity, and compatibility. Assignment, therefore, is also determined by the needs of particular faculties. Teachers have a part in determining their own assignment. Procedures exist for reassignment for any legitimate reason. A staff is organized for assignments in ways that best carry out school goals and objectives. They work as a team in achieving school goals, whether teaching alone or with others.

Staff evaluation – evaluation is regular and continuous and based upon standards arrived at cooperatively. Standards reflect the goals and objectives of the school and are made public. Modes of evaluation include self, student, administrative, and peer. Evaluation initially (pretenure) is primarily for retention purposes. After tenure is granted, evaluation is focused mainly on improving individual teacher and faculty effectiveness.

Staff development -- continuing or in-service education is directly related to evaluation. It is a regular part of a teacher's work load. It is designed by and with teachers to help teachers increase their teaching effectiveness. Staff development counselors assist individual teachers and teams of teachers in assessing and meeting development needs. Counselors are nonadministrative.

Legislation and/or state board policies provide human and material support to operate the above programs. Planned, state-approved staff development programs are supported by formula beyond the regular per pupil allotment of dollars.

Resources

There is a variety of printed material available to teachers and students. Standards of the ALA, ASLA, ASCD, and subject matter organizations have been considered in ascertaining the adequacy of holdings.

Films, videotapes, and other audiovisual materials are available to teachers and students—and there are adequate facilities for individual and group viewing. Standards for school media programs of the ALA and NEA have been considered in ascertaining the adequacy of the local school holdings.

Community resources in people, places, and things have been identified and are utilized by teachers and students as an integral part of schooling.

Work experience in the community is used by most students under the supervision of the school as a regular part of the program of study.

Building, facilities, equipment, and other necessary physical resources are provided to carry out the school program.

The school budget is adequate to provide the resources, equipment, and facilities called for in the above.

Governance

There is general agreement (statement or description) among teachers and students (and to an extent, parents) about the kind of living place school should be. Included in this statement are defined rights and responsibilities of students and faculty and description of the mechanisms (including checks and balances) created to ensure established rights and responsibilities.

A statement on academic, personal, and professional freedom in school—for students and teachers—has been developed by teachers and students. (The American Civil Liberties Union pamphlet, Academic Freedom in the High School, is illustrative.)

The faculty, administration, and student body are organized and structured to make possible efficient, effective decision making on problems of mutual concern.

The school board, school faculty, and administration understand their respective spheres of influence, power, and decision making.

State boards and commissions, made up of a majority of teacher practitioners, exist under law or by state board action to regulate the preparation and licensure of new teachers, to monitor practice in service (in conjunction with local practices panels), to approve in-service or staff development programs, and to provide due process for cases of alleged malpractice or unethical professional behavior.

State board of education functions are clearly delineated and complement the work of professional boards and commissions.

State legislation has been enacted that (1) sanctions negotiations and/or other mechanisms for establishing policies and agreements at the local level on goal setting, students, program, staff, resources, and governance; (2) establishes job security through tenure or continuing contract; (3) protects teachers and other educational personnel in matters of liability (save harmless law); (4) establishes an adequate retirement system; (5) includes teachers in social security (FICA); (6) inciudes teachers in a workmen's compensation plan; and (7) qualifies teachers for tax-sheltered annuity programs.

State legislation has been enacted enabling reciprocity with all states in the certification of teachers.

Part III

ACCOUNTABILITY: FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

Since it is impractical to define accountability as a vacuous, untested theory, it must be considered as a part of the real work of due process, teacher advocacy, and political action. Were we able to define the issue of accountability, to define it so that the improvement of the quality of education were its chief goal, the professional and academic communities would eagerly join the public in enthusiastic support of accountability legislation. The possibility of controlling such definition, if it ever existed, is deteriorating daily. The notion that accountability measures currently under legislative deliberation are capable of improving education is in almost all cases pure fantasy.

The reality of the situation is that accountability has become a political shibboleth, a code word that communicates coercion and control under the mask of concerned and responsible leadership. Any attempt to think strategically about the mode of response to the issue of accountability must begin with a recognition of its essentially political nature. Whatever ends one might wish to gain, whatever posture one might wish to assume, the political context of the issue must be accepted as the point of departure.

The causes behind the current accountability crisis are many and varied. Such factors as the taxpayer revolt, the public's loss of confidence in public institutions, the law and order mentality, etc., are extensively debated in the public press. More to the point of educational accountability are some new developments. Consider, for example, President Nixon's appointment of Caspar Weinberger as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Weinberger comes to HEW from the Office of Management and Budget where he earned the title "Cap the Knife" for his effectiveness in slashing budgets. Mr. Weinberger came to the federal government from California where he was Governor Reagan's director of finance. California, incidentally, has one of the most coercive and confusing accountability acts now in effect. The amendments tacked onto Title I and Title III of the ESEA are further evidence of the mood of the federal

government. The millions of dollars distributed under this Act are now a powerful wedge for incorporating punitive and narrow-minded accountability measures into state and local settings.

When one considers that the federal Office of Education and every state department of education has for decades had all the authority necessary to put accountability measures into effect, the legislative popularity of the issue becomes even more ominous. Such redundancies clearly are not motivated by desires to improve education.

Still other portents of the intent of accountability proposals come, as might be expected, from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the larger business community. The Chamber distributed materials throughout the nation urging the adoption of accountability legislation in the states. It is difficult to imagine that the Chamber's interest in the subject is the improvement of the quality of education.

None of the above is meant to imply that motivations behind the call for accountability are devoid of attempts at educational improvements. Such purposes do exist, but it is extremely doubtful that they can prevail when purely political goals of holding down taxes, controlling power, and pandering to business interests preempt the discussion.

These political and economic motivations are often unintentionally reinforced by attempts to incorporate systems theory and related managerial concepts into educational decision making. The past decade spawned numerous attempts to explore such approaches as behavioral objectives, criterion-based instruction, competency-based teaching, contingency management, behavioral modification, etc. With one glaring exception, the introduction of these "innovations" is accompanied by considerably more publicity than is the evaluation. The one exception is the federal government's notorious experiment with performance contracting—it was thoroughly and soundly evaluated, and judged a failure.

Little data and experience are available to support the incorporation of such innovations into legislation for educational accountability. Therefore, it is our position that, at this time, there is little evidence to warrant legislative

adoption of accountability acts if improvement of education is the goal. Wherever that goal is offered as the intent of such legislation, either naivete or cynicism is at play. Sufficient evidence is just not available to allow for other interpretation.

What, then, can the organized teaching profession do? There are several strategic possibilities that suggest themselves:

A. Role Differentiation

We view much of the accountability legislation to be redundant in view of the authority already vested in various branches and extensions of state governments. It is irresponsible in the extreme to devise legislation in any way punitive to teachers and local school districts merely because existing accountability mechanisms are inoperative. Clearly, the answer is to hold those now responsible accountable for their failures and not to refocus responsibility and accountability on those who are already the victims of inept management: students, teachers, and many local administrators.

Another aspect of role differentiation is the historical value of local control in education. Most of the accountability legislation we have seen sacrifices a significant degree of local control. Even where local options are built in, those options are restricted to the philosophical framework of system theory as currently practiced, and that framework has not as yet been able to accommodate humane and social values.

B. Regulation vs. Legislation

If the adoption of accountability measures appears inevitable, it would be preferable to have them in the form of state department regulations rather than in legislation. State regulations, though they generally enjoy the force of law, tend to be more manageable and adaptable; they are also easier to change and modify as new circumstances develop. Additionally, state department deliberations are more likely to incorporate educational deliberations and less likely to foster dramatic rhetoric than are legislative

deliberations. To attempt such a strategy, of course, assumes sufficient foresight to gain necessary lead time and sufficient control to offer the option persuasively.

A few states have now effected a kind of compromise between these alternatives: legislation that, in effect, mandates regulation. This approach has the virtue of appeasing both legislative and regulatory branches of government.

C. Deflate and Discredit

As mentioned above, most of the political debate over accountability symbolizes unspoken commitments to coercion, control, and budget slashing. It is the responsibility of the organized teaching profession to expose such intents and motivations for what they are.

D. Redefinition

Political debate over the issue of accountability appears also to have polarized public thinking about education. Many of the stronger advocates of accountability are unalterably opposed to attempts to make schools and education more humane, open, and joyous experiences. In too many forums, concern for learning and concern for children are mutually exclusive. Those who urge systemization and standardization of education are in one camp. Those who urge humanization, openness, and a few more smiles are in the other. Debate over accountability tends to make each see the other as the cause of education's troubles. Once the polarity is conceded, the danger of mutually exclusive choices is paramount. Legislative writ should never be used to set in concrete a single persuasion of educational thought. Such an action is antithetical to the goals of a pluralistic society. We cannot legislate innovation.

The organized teaching profession can provide an essential service in simply preventing this polarity from developing further. Concern for openness, involvement, and human growth must become a much larger part of all deliberations on the matter of accountability.

An earlier part of these materials argues for the deliberate consideration of all of the fundamental elements of the educational process: goals, students, programs, resources, staff, and governance. Any accountability mechanism that does not address each of these elements cannot hope to be more than incomplete and sporadic. At the very least, if the problem cannot be comprehensively approached, it is better let alone.

E. Imposition vs. Involvement

The clearest lesson learned from the past decade of striving for educational innovations is that programs not built on the understanding and commitment of those who must carry out decisions are doomed to failure. The continued flow of unilateral and arbitrary decisions from the top of the hierarchy down will work no better in the future than it has in the past.

Unfortunately, too often those in education with the most experience, wisdom, and knowledge are those with the least to say about what goes on. Those closest to the learner are farthest from control. The teacher must be recognized and accepted as the proper locus for authority and decision making in matters relating to curriculum and instruction. Anything short of this is playing games with superstructures. Such games have not the impact, nor such superstructures the substance, to amount to any significant increase in the advantages schools offer students. To believe they do is fantasy.

When teachers possess the authority and the decision-making power to perform their professional task, education will improve. When teachers are in that position, and only then, will we be able to address the question of accountability seriously enough to assume that it can make a difference. Until then, the only relevant accountability question is why teachers are not in that position. This is reality.

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